



FAQ – Doctoral Degrees in Nursing and Using the Title “Dr”

Question:

I am a nurse in Texas and recently graduated with a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP). Can I use the title “Dr” when I work with patients and other healthcare providers?

Answer:

One of the hallmarks of nursing is the approach to lifelong learning. As nurses earn advanced degrees, the number of nurses earning doctoral degrees is increasing. The longstanding tradition of addressing a person with an earned doctoral degree as “doctor” began many centuries ago as did the tradition of addressing a physician as “doctor”. The number of healthcare professionals with earned doctoral degrees may contribute to confusion for the public and for members of the healthcare team.

Credentials by Law

Known as the Healing Art Identification Act, Texas Occupations Code, Chapter 104 addresses the use of the term doctor.¹ To comply with the law, a nurse is required to include the degree that allows use of doctor as a credential² and indicate the profession being practiced. The Nursing Practice Act and Board Rules mandate that a Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) and a Registered Nurse (RN) display a clearly legible insignia specifying name and licensure level.³ The Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) is identified both as a RN and uses the appropriate advanced practice title authorized by the Board of Nursing (BON) when providing advanced practice care to patients.⁴ Based on requirements in the Texas laws, doctorally prepared nurses could not simply identify themselves as *Dr. _____*. The nurse must include the academic credential such as PhD (Doctor of Philosophy), DNS (Doctor of Nursing Science), DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice), or any other doctoral degree. Nurses must also include licensure level with appropriate APRN title, if applicable.

Communication

Communication takes many forms. Some verbal communications occur in person and have associated visual cues such as a name badge. Other verbal communications may occur by telephone, presenting unique challenges in assuring the parties are correctly identified. The information exchanged should include the name and licensure level of the parties involved. Written communications are required to include the name, licensure level, and the appropriate advanced practice title, if applicable, and may include academic degrees and certifications. The academic credential cannot replace the licensure credential. Inadequate identification of a nurse can be confusing to the public. Failure to comply with laws, rules, and regulations can result in disciplinary action. When using a doctoral credential, nurses are obligated to use the term in compliance with the law by identifying the “degree that gives rise to the use of the title”.²

Additional resources and references related to identification and advanced practice titles include:



Texas Board of Nursing

- *Texas Board of Nursing Bulletin* – When the Profession is Nursing and the Title is Dr....., July, 2011, p.4;
- *Texas Board of Nursing Bulletin* – Use of Advanced Practice Titles, July 2008, p.8; and
- *RN Update* – RN Identification is Essential in Today's Health Care Environment, January 1999, p.1.

To access these archived issues on the Board's website, www.bon.texas.gov, click on ***About the Board***, then ***Quarterly Newsletters***.

Footnotes

¹ Texas Occupations Code (TOC), Section 104.001

² TOC, Section 104.004

³ Nursing Practice Act (NPA), TOC, Section 301.351 and Board Rule 217.10

⁴ Board Rule 221.11

Posted May 2013